

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re the patent application of Gilham

Serial No. Not yet assigned (Continuation of Appln. No. 09/031744)

Filing date: August 23, 2001

Title: SECURITY AND AUTHENTICATION OF POSTAGE INDICIA

Group Art Unit -- Examiner

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Sir:

Please amend this application by substituting the enclosed amended page 1 of the original application.

Cancel claims 1-10 and insert new claims 11-13 as on the attached sheet.



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SECURITY AND AUTHENTICATION OF POSTAGE INDICIA

This is a continuation of application no. 09/031744, filed on February 27, 1998.

5 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to postage indicia printed on mail items and to the provision of security and authentication of said indicia.

10 Postage meters have been utilized over a long period to print postage indicia on mail items, the postage indicia indicating that postage has been applied to the mail item and that accounting has been effected in respect of the applied postage.

Known postage meters include an electronic circuit for carrying out accounting functions in relation to amounts of postage charges applied to mail item. The electronic circuit receives an input of a desired postage charge to be applied to a
15 mail item, carries out accounting in respect of the required postage charge and then operates a printer of the postage meter to print a postage indicium on the mail item. Generally the postage indicium includes at least the postage charge, the date on which the indicium is printed and an identification of the postage meter.

20 Previously, the printer of the postage meter comprised a rotatable drum printer in which a die plate carried by the drum printed fixed invariable information of the indicium and settable print wheels carried by the drum printed variable information of the indicium. The fixed invariable information comprises a graphical pattern, a meter identification number and the originating postage region
25 for the mail. The variable information comprises an amount of the postage charge and the date of printing the indicium.

The postage meter is constructed in a secure manner by being housed in a secure housing and the printing means which prints the indicium is constructed to work

11. A method of printing postal indicia on a plurality of mail items, said postal indicia including postage data and an authentication code, including the steps of:
 - storing a secret key;
 - determining a period of time in which postal indicia are to be printed on a plurality of mail items;
 - storing a postage value relating to postage charges dispensed in said period of time;
 - providing postage data including said postage value;
 - generating a modified key relating specifically to a mail item by utilizing said secret key and said postage data;
 - generating an authentication code by utilizing said modified key and said postage data; and printing said postage data and said authentication code as a postal indicium on said mail item.
12. Postage meter apparatus for printing postal indicia on a plurality of mail items, said postal indicia including postage data and an authentication code, including:
 - clock means operative to determine a period of time in which postal indicia are to be printed on a plurality of mail items;
 - a register for storing a postage value relating to postage charges dispensed in said period of time;
 - memory means for storing a secret key;
 - electronic control means; and
 - input means operable to input item data relating to a mail item to said electronic control means;wherein said electronic control means is configured to generate a modified key relating specifically to said mail item by utilizing said

secret key and postage data including said item data and said postage value, and generate an authentication code by utilizing said modified key and said postage data.

13. Postage meter apparatus as claimed in claim 12, including:
a further register for storing a value of credit;
and wherein said postage data includes said value of credit.